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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 MUSCAT 000766

SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA/ARPI, DRL (JDEMARIA), NEA/PI (SFRANCESKI)
STATE PASS USTR FOR B. CLATANOFF
USDOL FOR JIM SHEA
ABU DHABI FOR MEPI
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SUBJECT: OMAN APPOINTS -- NOT ELECTS -- ILO DELEGATION

REF: MUSCAT 534

SUMMARY

11. In an unexpected turn of events on May 4, the Minister of Manpower retreated from promised committee-wide elections and instead personally appointed a National Committee to represent Omani labor interests at the International Labor Organization (ILO) Conference in June. Disappointed, workers' representatives nonetheless continue to network with newly established committees throughout the country to provide mutual support and identify challenges ahead. In addition to requests to us for technical assistance on a variety of basic topics, the committees have also expressed concerns with ambiguities in the 2003 Labor Law. Representatives have formally requested the Manpower Ministry to provide clarification on protections for employees taking part in committee activities, how the committees are to operate, and future plans for the now-revised National Committee. End summary.

NO TIME FOR ELECTIONS

12. On May 4, Manpower Minister Juma bin Ali bin Jumaa, citing time pressures, canceled the plan for national elections this month to select a National Committee to represent Omani labor interests at the International Labor Organization (ILO) Conference beginning May 31. This unexpected decision to appoint the National Committee instead comes just weeks after the Minister, in consultations with Deputy Under Secretary for Labor Arnold Levine, reiterated his firm commitment to hold committee-wide elections by mid-May to form Oman's first elected delegation for representation at the ILO (reftel). Worker representatives who were fervently hoping for national elections by May 4 are frustrated with the appointments and concerned that the new committee may not adequately represent worker interests at the ILO. They are particularly troubled that human resource managers from some of Oman's largest companies, including Omantel and Port Services Corporation, hold 8 of the 11 seats on the committee. (Note: Human resource managers are seen by many rank-and-file members as essentially representing management, rather than labor, interests. End note.) The following 11 individuals were appointed to the new National Committee for a term of two years:

Abd al-Azim bin Abbas al-Bahrani
Director of Human Resources Omantel

Sa'ud bin Ali Abdulla al-Jabri
Engineer, Petroleum Development Oman Co.

Muhammad bin Abdulla Rashid al-Rasbi
Engineer, Oman Air

Anwar bin Abd al-Rahman al-Khinjari
Director of Human Resources, Muscat Intercontinental Hotel

Nabhan bin Ahmad Muhammad al-Battashi
General Affairs Officer, Grand Hyatt Muscat

Sa'ud bin Ahmed Abd al-Karim al-Nahari
Executive President of Port Services Corporation, Port Sultan Qaboos

Muhammad Hamad Salim al-Ruzaiqi
General Manager of Human Resources, Galfar Engineering

Muhammad bin Khamis bin Ghaloum al-Khabouri
Assistant Human Resources Manager, Al Hasan Group of Companies

Rashid bin Sa'id Abdulla al-Hashmi
Personnel Manager, Sa'ud Bahwan Group of Companies

Abd al-Mahdi bin Abd al-Baqi al-Lawati

Personnel Manager, Al Zubair Group of Companies

Abdulla bin Salim Sa'id al-Araimi
Manager of Human Resources, Suhail Bahwan Group of Companies

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

13. Cognizant of the challenges that lay before them, worker representatives continue to network with newly established committees throughout the country to support one another and identify challenges ahead. Representatives have expressed particular interest in learning more about committee experiences in the region and welcome any opportunity to meet with counterparts from Bahrain and Jordan. They are keen to participate in workshops or seminars that would cover such fundamentals as the basics of committee establishment, charter development, methods of operation, and ensuring committee financial solvency. Avenues for assistance have been highlighted in all facets of organized labor and represent significant opportunities for developing long-term relationships with organizations such as the AFL-CIO, the Solidarity Center, the Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI), and the Department of Labor (DOL).

14. In addition to their requests for technical assistance, the committees have also expressed concerns with what they say is ambiguity in the 2003 Labor Law. Lead representatives from the committees have formally requested that the Ministry of Manpower provide further clarification in the following areas:

NATIONAL COMMITTEE - How and when will the National Committee will be elected? Where will its premises be? What will be its exact duties? Will members of the Committee's administrative body serve full-time?

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE - What technical assistance needs have been identified at the MOM and how and when will assistance be offered?

EMPLOYEE PROTECTION - Will the MOM establish a mechanism to provide protection to members of representation committees against arbitrary dismissal as a result of their committee activities?

FUNDING - What avenues are available for committees to collect contributions for the representation committees and the National Committee? Moreover, will companies be expected to facilitate contributions by employees and/or provide support during a committee's establishment?

COMMENT

15. Sending an elected delegation to the ILO in June would have been a significant and ambitious development in labor relations in Oman. The general feeling among disappointed committee members is that the elections were an opportunity lost at a crucial point. Recognizing the challenges that lay ahead, both within the nascent committees and at the equally inexperienced Ministry of Manpower, representatives nonetheless continue to be proactive in soliciting support for technical assistance to learn about labor experiences in the region and in laying the foundation for stronger and more effective representation in the future.

BALTIMORE